

SLAPSTICK AND DUMBBELL



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HILER HARZBERG AND ARTHUR MOSS

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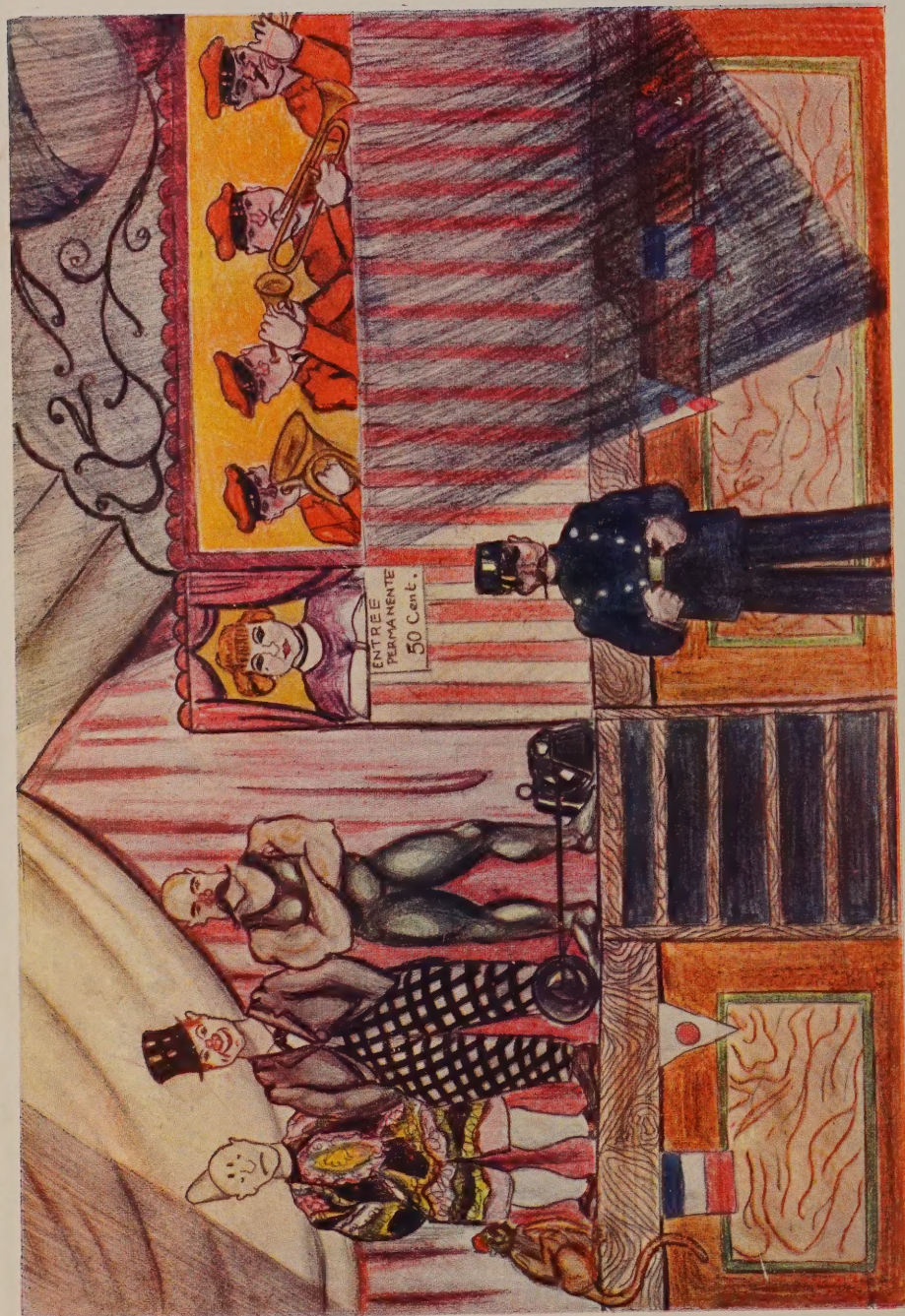
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HILER HARZBERG AND ARTHUR MOSS



Cirque Ambulant
Drawing by Hiler

SLAPSTICK AND DUMBBELL

A CASUAL SURVEY OF
CLOWNS and CLOWNING

BY
HILER HARZBERG
AND ARTHUR MOSS

A few of these pages, have appeared, in
slightly different form, in *The Freeman*.

FAINT NOTE OF INTRODUCTION

Slapstick and Dumbell was, I believe, originally intended to be an essay on the circus as a whole; but the most vital and enduring factor in the popularity of the circus ran away with the idea, and it became a monograph on clowns.

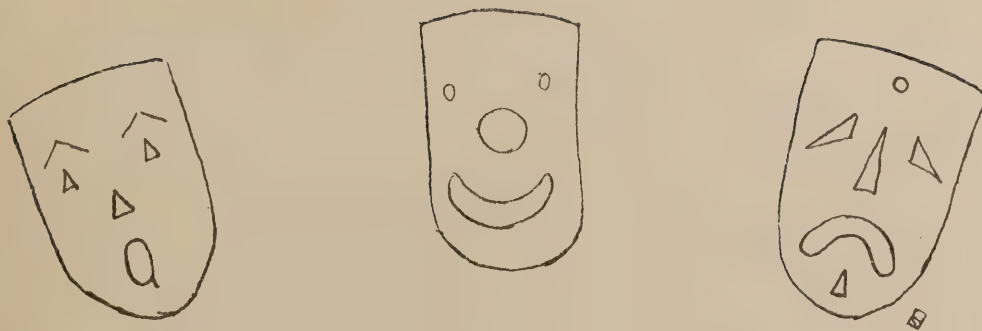
In Paris particularly, the clown is a figure of importance to all sorts of people. In the circus, well known clowns are given star positions on the bill; many spectators arrive just in time for their acts and depart immediately afterwards. Not only does the clown perform in the circus; he plays music hall engagements; does specialties at smart dance places and all night festivals; entertains children in the big department stores during the holidays.

If it is now and then fashionable in both France and America to indulge in the precious pastime of estimating the universal symbolism and psychological significance of the clown, the real and continued enjoyment of clowning is fundamental and non-analytical. This is clearly evident in Paris, from the patent pleasure of the street mob in some green-wagon entertainment to the sincere delight of the Saturday nighters when the Fratellinis play fire-department at the Medrano or Charlie stands on his ear at the Cirque de Paris.

Two virtues the writers may well claim for this discourse on clowning ancient and modern. One is a complete freedom from sentimentalizing, which used to be the inevitable accompaniment of any interest in clowns as human beings. The other is a thorough distaste for those aesthetic maunderings which serve so often to turn a healthy appreciation of buffoonery into a languishing intellectual pose. In this case, the illustrations as well as the text leave no doubt as to the real gusto of the authors.

FLORENCE GILLIAM

Paris, 1924.



In the last year or two there has been a tremendous revival of intellectual appreciation of such humble entertainers as circus and music-hall virtuosi. Our youngest generation of critics is copying, unwittingly perhaps, the early Eighteen Nineties, when under the influence of the de Goncourts, and Toulouse-Lautrec, writers and painters of that remote period frequented a small circus on the Rue Benouville in Paris. At the moment, we find the critical brotherhood of smart and highbrow magazines in America rhapsodizing over Charlie Chaplin, the Rath Brothers, Bird Millmann, and other excellent jongleurs whose names and deeds have been common property for a decade. Our very highbrowest critic gushes about the Fratellinis coincidental with the decoration of these popular zannies by the French Academy. The mediocre critic is never more than a short jump ahead of the academy which in turn is seldom more than ten years behind the poor old public.

The clown has been a pet character of many writers. Too often he has been pictured as a combination of imbecilities with no more relation to truth than the popular American belief that all Frenchmen above the age of sixteen have mistresses. One of the characteristics of the fiction clown is that though he may be crushed under some overwhelming personal tragedy, he stoically goes about his daily labors. The

same may be said of many woolen merchants, bridge-builders, bus-drivers, literary critics, gland-experts, and Shriners. Another clown attribute dear to the hearts of fictioneers is that the humble zanni is usually a good Shakespearian scholar. This bunk has gained in popular belief since the announcement a few years ago that Charlie Chaplin would one day play Hamlet.

Clowns are people. Extraordinary clowns are extraordinary people ; so too are gifted college professors, singers, woodcarvers, physicians, and statesmen, if any. A poor clown is as great a bore as a poor dramatic critic, no more and no less. As a profession, clowning, by reason of its great antiquity and its vast popularity at all times, is as eminently respectable as preaching. That Billy Sunday draws bigger audiences than Grock only proves the former's superiority as a buffoon. The circus, whether it be called arena or tabernacle, will always, if it offers a good show, fill the pockets of its backers.

Though strength, skill, and dexterity are important elements in circus entertainment, the clowns have always been the most popular members of the personnel. They represent a phase as old as the theatre itself.



Drawing by Heuzé

It is impossible to state with exactitude just when and where the clown came into being. It is reasonable to assume that the first clowning was accidental and that the first clowns were sublimely unconscious as to just how funny they were. Many of them are that way today. Probably during Cro-Magnon days, some would-be Strong Man attempted to heave a bear into the air. Up went the animal, but the artist was too slow to get out of his own way. So the bear crashed down and squashed the poor moron to the delight of his simple-minded companions. The professors assure us that all hearty humor is based on just such pain and discomfort, to the other fellow. (Cain clouting Abel over the bean was an uproariously funny joke. Cain's subsequent wanderings over the earth may be interpreted as a long engagement to play the Biblical Circuit. This act is the ancestor of all slapstick and custard pie comedy.) For many decades the bear act proved extremely popular, until some tribal chief discovered that his best fighting men were being ruined in their attempts at heavy comedy. So the act was modified and its comic value reduced many calories. It is unfortunate that what records we have of the period prior to Ancient Greece, deal chiefly with the doings of warriors, rulers, poets, soothsayers, philosophers, priests, and other such mortal afflictions. Hardly anything definite is known about the circus acts of the ages before the glory of Athens. And even the Greek records on the subject are so fragmentary as to allow for little more than speculation. There is a passage in the Talmud that points to the existence of clowns in Ancient Judea. It relates that a Rabbi one day met Elijah, the wandering spirit of prophecy in Hebrew lore and asked who was worthy of eternal life. Elijah pointed to two clowns who were amusing the bystanders. The Rabbi, a serious fellow, showed great astonishment. "Scorn them not", said the Prophet, "it is always their habit, even when not performing for hire, to cheer the depressed and sorrowful. By their merry talk they cause sufferers to forget grief." This Talmudic legend is probably the father of the sentimentality anent the clown's merriness at all times. "Under his coat of motley his heart is bursting with grief". Chord, please, Professor!

The ancient Egyptian god Typhon is believed by some authorities to represent the deification of the clown or grotesque. The characteristic traits of all the Typhon masques were the huge gross face and the large projecting tongue. It appears to be the original of a long series of grotesque faces through Greece and Rome and up through the Middle Ages. Thomas Wright in his *History of Caricature*, traces the antiquity of souse comedy. At the religious feasts in early Greece, as the performers got more and more liquored up, they became more rowdy, launched ribald insults at each other, and burlesqued each other's sober characteristics. Among primitive peoples such as the South Sea Islanders, North American Indians, etc., the long historical plays and pantomimes got on the nerves of such naive folk. Comic interludes came into being in the same way and for the same reason that they were introduced into the religious performances of the Middle Ages. In Dr. Karl Mantzius' *History of Theatrical Art*, that excellent historian says : "At the Polynesian *Hura*, (family ball) when the young girls were tired of dancing, merry clowns came forward and filled up the pauses with burlesque capers and gesticulations". In the direct line of descent we have the modern studio dance, where during lulls in the foxtrotting the Life of the Party steps out and pulls conscious or unconscious comedy. The ancient Chinese were too subtle and over-refined to bother much about clowns. The doings of buffoons are given scant attention in the annals of the Chinese stage. The Japs, imitative of neighboring refinements, naturally felt the same way about it.



Egyptian figure showing typhon masque

The first definite appearance of the clown or grotesque as an entertainer was on the Greek stage of Aeschylus. The word *zany* is derived from the Greek. The heavy sombre tragedies were occasionally relieved by the antics of actors wearing comic masques. (This survived to quite a recent period in the ten-twenty-third melodrama with its relief of the comic *oleo*.) In the time of Aristophanes, the best joke of the clown Hermon was to slam a stick against the skulls of his fellow actors, while the comique Parmenon got laughs by imitating the grunting of a hog.



Scene from an Early Greek Comedy

The Romans acquired the clown along with many other refinements of Greek civilization. Buffoons were in high favor with the Romans and brought comic relief to the otherwise dull and heavy banquets. The *manducus* or *joculator* was a clown who wore a grotesque masque with a large mouth and protruding tongue ; somewhat the Typhon make up. He portrayed a gluttonous eater and burlesqued vulgar manners. Suetonius tells of clowns who played in the streets as well as in

theatres and at private parties. The Roman word for clown was *sannio*. The English word, *clown*, (French, *cloun*) is derived from *clunaculum* which was a short wooden sword employed by the Roman buffoon as a slapstick. The costume was often composed of a multitude of little pieces of cloth of many colors called *centunculus*. (It may be that Joseph's coat was one of these trick costumes and aided him to clown so well as to win high favor with Pharaoh.) Among the Roman clowns were four standardized types who were the ancestors of the principal characters of the *Commedia dell' Arte*. These were Maccus with his low flat forehead, monstrous drooping nose, and double hunch on his back, (later, Pulcinella) ; Bucco the jabbering insolent swaggering parasite, (Arlechinno) ; Pappus the ridiculous old miser, (Pantalone); and Dossenus the knavish soothsayer, (Il Dottore). The *sannio* enjoyed a freedom of speech and action quite impossible in our happy age of censorship. Some authorities think the Romans borrowed the buffoon from the Etruscans because of the workmanship and character of some of the masques employed. Other authorities emphatically reject this theory for the same reason. Perhaps this violent difference of opinion is what makes them authorities.



Etruscan Buffoon carrying in his left hand what was probably the earliest form of slapstick



Roman Manducus (Note Socks)



THE CLOWN

Drawing by Fernand Leger

Since early Roman days, Italy has been the cradle of fine buffoonery. Back of the slapstick, whether it is wielded by Bucco or Arlechinno or Alberto Fratellini, we see the fine Italian hand.

The slapstick has always been the clown's principal guffaw-fetcher. It is a versatile weapon. It ends disputes, silences enemies, and even disciplines wives. It is a veritable *deus ex machina* of all this comic world. It is the most marvelous of all dramatic resources. No spoken joke is half so funny as a slapstick wallop.

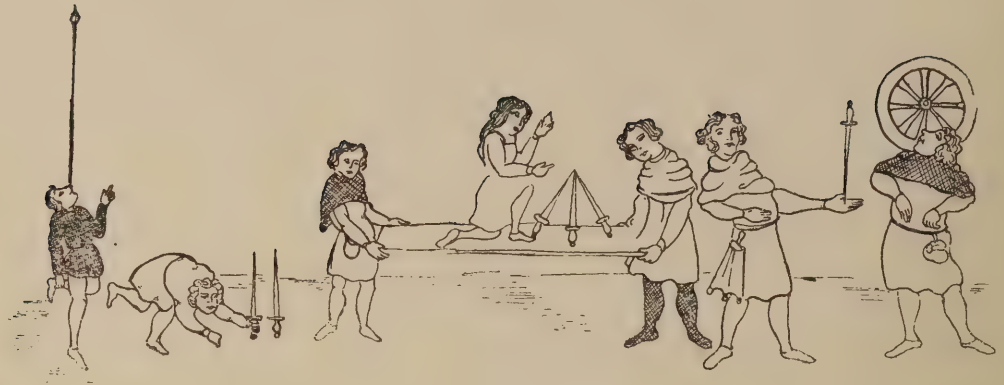
With the decline of the Roman Empire, the theatre also slid into a state of general debility. About the year 300 A.D. we find records of the Church hurling edicts and bans against the buffoons for singing "impure songs" and condemning their drolleries as "diabolic and frivolous". Evidence of clowns at the court of Attila is found in Priscus. Commenting on the embassy from Theodosius II to Attila, he says: "A Moorish and Scythian buffoon in turn excited the mirth of the rude spectators by their deformed figures, ridiculous dress, antic gestures, absurd speeches, and the strange unintelligible confusion of the Latin, the Gothic, and the Hunnish languages. The hall resounded with loud and licentious peals of laughter. In the midst of this intemperate riot, Attila alone, without change of countenance, maintained his inflexible gravity." Good picture of a First Nighter.

We have few records of the diversions of the ancient Teutons and Scandinavians. The protracted drinking bouts of the long winter evenings offered excellent

opportunity for singing and story telling. From the amount of hootch which must have been consumed on these occasions, we can safely assume that the boys got boisterous and pulled a lot of wassail comedy. Evidences also indicate that in the chief's household there usually was a comedian who occupied the position of official wise cracker as did Humferth in *Beowulf* and Sir Kay in the later *Morte d'Arthur*. It is probable that Roman mimes were cordially received by the Barbarians. There are many representations of them in old illuminated manuscripts.

The most comprehensive evidence we have of the existence of mimes through the Dark and Middle Ages is in the records of attacks made upon them from time to time by the Church. Countless classic allusions point to the fact that entertainers were often extremely popular with monks and nuns. At certain periods they were in such high favor that they were introduced into religious fetes and even tolerated in the churches.

The Roman clown was introduced into Saxon England. In Anglo-Saxon vocabularies we find the word *mimus* appearing as *gli mon* (gleeman). *Glig* or *glin* signified any kind of gaiety or play. Illuminated manuscripts reveal that the performances of these entertainers consisted of juggling as well as clowning. Among the peoples conserving the Latin tongue, *mimus* was replaced by other words serving the same idea. *Jocus*, *jocari*, *joculator*, became *jeu* in French, *gioco* or *giuco* in Italian, and *joker* in English. The verb *jocare* became *jouer* in French. *Joculator* was then employed in the sense of *mimus*, and became in French *joueur* or *jongleur* and in Chaucer's English, *joggelere*, (juggler).



In the ecclesiastical plays of the Middle Ages the clown again appears, usually in the role of a comic devil. The chief devil is represented as a grand Prince of Darkness with the buffoon as a sort of foil, like the low-comedy servant in farce. A pitchfork did valiant duty as a slapstick. Practically all the mystery plays were full of comic scenes. The secular plays were in the main, farces, and the audiences were most interested in the buffoon parts. But the great line of clowns shows principally in the Middle Ages in what were called *Fool Companies*. These were compact organizations with regular constitutions and as many administrative titles as the Shriners and Noble Red Men. The best known company was *Les Connards* (Cornards, from the two horns, *cornes*, on the fool's cap), organized in 1541 at Rouen. The earliest of the Fool Companies called *Les Enfants Sans Souci*, was supposed to have originated toward the end of the Fourteenth Century and to have lasted till the early part of the Seventeenth Century. Founded on the splendid principle that the world was mad and all men fools, it played an important part in the life of Paris. It was governed by a Prince of Fools. All the members wore the established fool's costume in public.

The traditional fool's dress included a tight-fitting hood with asses' ears, coxcomb and bells ; a coat with long pointed flaps which were sometimes tipped with bells ; and long tight trousers. The chief colors were light green and saffron : green standing for youth and vigor, and saffron for gayety as the odor of saffron was supposed to be particularly animating. An ornate sceptre was carried and employed as a slapstick. At the time of Francis I, Pontalais was the great fool, high in royal favor.



Another famous fool of the period was Jean Serre who excelled in acting comic drunks. The work of French fools of this period shows little of the Italian influence. It is not till the end of the Sixteenth Century that the French comiques take on the appearance of characters of the *Commedia dell' Arte*.

The strolling *jongleur* of the Middle Ages combined all the attributes of his Roman predecessor and added others. Women *jongleurs* frequently took part with the men and with them made grimaces, fell into strange lewd postures, and indulged in all sorts of ribaldries. The medieval public's lack of sentimentality made almost everything boisterous. There is some reason for the Belloc and Chestertonian glorification of those ribald days. The *jongleur's* tricks included rope-walking, dancing, magic, purse-cutting, and other directly useful manifestations of skill. Gradually the *jongleurs* passed off the landscape. Their feats of skill and dexterity became the properties of the more modern acrobats and jugglers. The singing became the characteristic of the minstrel. The *jongleur* had been an extremely important adjunct to the life of the period. The Feudal Four Hundred were too often bored out of their tin suits with the long-winded recitals of household glories by the family bards. They pined for an occasional good old horse laugh. The heavy slapstick of the traveling buffoon, comedy that was rough and highly-spiced, made these itinerant fellows exceedingly welcome visitors. Through the Crusades, European *jongleurs* got into touch with their Eastern confreres. They found the Oriental Circuit going strong and undoubtedly pinched many sure-fire acts.



A Picasso design for Pulcinella
(From a program of the Russian Ballet)



Costume designed by M. Larionov
for the chief clown in Chout, a
buffoonery produced by Diaghilew's
Russian Ballet

In clowning, as in so many other phases of life, we find the greatest traditionalism amongst Orientals. Present day Arab buffoons use a makeup that is hundreds of years old: head shaven except for one long tuft of hair, and the face painted in certain standardized patterns. The costume is generally a vertically striped loose tunic and short breeches. No slapstick is employed but blows are delivered with the cupped hand. Control of facial muscles is developed to an amazing degree. When one Arab clown strikes another, the swatted one hesitates for several seconds and then falls over. This bit of business is known to be many centuries old and is still a never-failing laugh getter.

Late in the Fifteenth Century, the *Commedia dell' Arte* came into being. Its exact origin is somewhat obscure, but it is generally thought to have evolved from the strolling bands of clowns, acrobats, jugglers, and musicians. Whatever its actual inception, the Comedy of Art was a descendant of the Roman *attelana*. To give a comprehensive account of this important development is a job which requires professional diligence, a quality possessed by neither of the present writers.

In the *Commedia dell' Arte*, clowning, in the roles of Arlechinno, Pantalone, Il Dottore, First Zanni, and Second Zanni, is brought to its highest pitch of cleverness and skill. The heritage of the Comedy of Art has come down to us in a long line of superb circus clowns. Improvization, the chief factor in its greatness, is the distinguishing quality of the best contemporary clowns. This early Italian buffoonery was based on the peculiarities and eccentricities of town councilors, prominent merchants, and other such petty pishosh. In *Theatre Arts Magazine* for October 1923, Vadim Uraneff makes an interesting comparison of the buffoons of the *Commedia dell' Arte* with Charlie Chaplin, Eddie Cantor, Frank Tinney, Jimmy Watts, James



Buffoons of the comedy of art
From an old print

Barton, and other contemporary American type comedians. Of course these fellows, with the exception of Chaplin, belong more to the category of comedians, than to that of clowns. Probably the best example of a clown on the recent American stage was Fred Stone. Graduating from the circus into musical comedy, he carried with him a whole bag of typical clown tricks. The decline of the *Commedia dell'Arte* came about principally because the boys got upstage. They wanted to appear in "regular" plays with lines written specially for them.

The English clown grew up almost contemporaneously with the Comedy of Art, though on the whole English buffoonery was but little influenced by the Italian school. The great Elizabethan clown was Dick Tarlton. He died in 1588 when Shakespeare was twenty four. There is reason to believe that Tarlton acted with Shakespeare in some of the latter's plays. Tarlton was the buffoon of great versatility. He danced, sang, tumbled, and like the characters in the Comedy of Art, made up most of his stuff as he went along. Shakespeare objected strenuously to this business of extemporizing. It was over this question that he had a tremendous row with his principal clown, William Kemp. It may be that Shakespeare was piqued at Kemp's hogging of the stage. The great dramatist certainly wasn't reticent in expressing his opinions of clowns. In the rules for the players which Hamlet speaks, he uses the following caustic words: "Let those that play your clowns speak no more than is set down for them ; for there be of them that will themselves laugh, to set on some quantity of barren spectators to laugh too ; though in the meantime, some necessary question of the play be then to be considered : that's villainous and shews a most pitiful ambition in the fool that uses it." (*Hamlet*, III, 2.)

Kemp, incidentally, is the fellow who danced the Morris all the way from London to Norwich, nine days and a hundred miles of dancing with short nightly rests. That's something for Twentieth Century jazz marathoners to think about.



Dick Tarlton
(From a contemporary print)

The costume of one type of Elizabethan clown has come down to the modern circus. It consisted of frizzed out hair, frilled neck ruff, and loose baggy tunic and bloomers : it was a burlesque of the dress of the Elizabethan gallant.

The influence of the *Commedia dell' Arte* spread all over Europe. It particularly flourished in France, partly due to the exhibitions by strolling Italian companies and in part to the growth of French organizations. Such an important figure in the history of the French stage as Molière was an enthusiastic admirer of the Comedy of Art. His ideal of the clown actor was Tiberio Fiorilli, a famous *Scaramuccia* who became his teacher and instructed him in fine points of Italian buffoonery. Molière's first real comedy, *L'Etourdi*, was built upon a scenario of the *Commedia dell' Arte*. However, in France as well as elsewhere, the comedians soon felt themselves too important to indulge in mere improvization and aspired to high comedy parts with nice lines written for them by real playwrights. So the true clown suffered a period of comparative obscurity and appeared on the scene again chiefly as a street performer.





A German Hanswurst of the late Seventeenth Century
(From a rare print)



Eighteenth Century Clowns and Jugglers

We have seen in contemporary American magazines such droll terms as *hanswurst* and *pickelherring*. The clown in Germany, as far back as the days of Martin Luther, was called a *hanswurst*. Later, by way of Holland, *pickelherring* became his nickname. The *hanswursts* and *pickelherrings* of the late Seventeenth and early Eighteenth Centuries went in for the heaviest kind of slapstick comedy. The *hanswurst* sticking his finger in the *pickelherring's* eye, and the latter booting the former abaft of his main hatch, were the ancestors of a long line of German buffoons leading down to our own Weber and Fields. In their music hall days, Weber and Fields depended on intensive clouting as much as much as on the wheeze.

But in Germany too, the pompous period began in the theatre, and the clown was relegated to the sidewalk as a mere vagabond entertainer of bumpkins and children.

At the beginning of the Eighteenth Century clowning came into favor again in England in the shape of *harlequinades* at the Drury Lane and Lincoln's Inn Fields theatres. The most popular harlequin of the time was John Rich whose father built Covent Garden in 1732. *Harlequin*, descended directly from *Arlechinno*, or even from the Roman *Bucco*, became a fixture in English pantomime and extravaganza.

The character of the modern circus clown was originated by Joe Grimaldi who was born in London in 1778. Joe was the illegitimate son of Giuseppi Grimaldi, better known as "Iron Legs", a pantomime dancer of great ability, and Mrs. Rebecca Drucker, a dancer at Drury Lane. The child was literally shoved on the stage at the age of three in the role of a monkey. Trained with the utmost rigor and severity he appeared regularly with his father at Sadler's Wells Theatre. After the death of his father, which took place in Joe's eleventh year, and which left the family in extreme poverty, the youngster worked in pantomime for exceedingly meager wages. By his twentieth year he was well up the climb to the top of his profession. He became the star of Drury Lane and the idol of London. His greatness was due chiefly to his inexhaustible inventiveness. Much of the business he originated is used with but little modification by clowns today. A great many myths and legends have been attached to Grimaldi. It is told of him, as it is of most great clowns, that in his dying hours he rallied himself long enough to indulge in a last exhibition of buffoonery. This and other sob stories are utterly disposed of by Charles Dickens who, under the name of Boz, edited Grimaldi's memoirs. The book itself, while fairly veracious, is dull and long-winded. It reveals a Grimaldi as vain and cheap as a retired bank director. Dickens sadly botched the editorial job, for which he proffers lame excuses in his apologetic preface.

Grimaldi had so many followers and imitators that he appears as the founder of a school. He had created the turn of the comic acrobat who does stunts of great difficulty which at the same time seem maladroit. Auriol was the first French clown of the Grimaldi type. He was a mime, juggler, but chiefly a comic acrobat. Mazurier was another of the versatile clowns of the early Nineteenth Century in France. And then there was Jocko who was so known because he was made up as a monkey. He would leap and climb about the balconies, making perilous swings, but tempering them with irresistible drolleries.

However, for a long period, England was the nursery of clowning. The great Italian tradition of buffoonery which derived from earliest Roman days, received a very special direction in England, chiefly because Anglo-Saxon audiences were so hard-boiled. The Italian volubility was tempered and restrained, stripped to sure-fire essentials, and the acrobatic side emphasized more than ever before. The naive British public always admired feats of bodily strength and skill more than subtlety and wit. Edmond de Goncourt and Hugues Le Roux in their writings about clowns, see in all this a peculiarly Anglo-Saxon love of brutality and force, and a rather far-fetched sense of satire which is quite different from the Italian spirit. At any rate, England undoubtedly produced the best clowns of the Nineteenth Century. From England came Billy Hayden, Lavater Lee, the Hanlon-Lees, Tony Grice, Bip, and the delightful Footit.

Footit was the son of a clown. He started life as a bareback rider but soon worked into the clown game. He perfected a crystalized grin that became his best laugh getter. Footit represents a type of English clown far removed from the Grimaldi



George Cruikshank

**Joe Grimaldi in a Harlequinade
Drawing by George Cruikshank**

character. Though Grimaldi used many spoken jokes, his principal business was comic acrobatics. Footit steadily worked in the opposite direction, and at the height of his greatness, he had entirely discarded acrobatics. He was one of the best examples of the *clown parleur* who through conversation establishes intimate contact with the audience.



Footit and Chocolate
(From a drawing owned by Mme Footit)

One of the authentic stories about Footit is the tale of how he discovered his partner. One day, on leaving the circus, he was approached by a down and out negro, a valet who had been left stranded by a traveling actor. He was much impressed by the black man's droll facial expression and decided that he was good arena material. Due in part to Footit's careful training, the negro soon became famous under the nom de cirque of Chocolate.

Upon his death a few years ago, Footit was succeeded by his son Tommy Footit, a clever enough clown, but minus the old fellow's touch of greatness. Chocolate, by the way, was also succeeded by a son who is the droll and original Chocolat Fils, considered by many critics to be the best contemporary *clown parleur*, and at the moment paired with the clever Porto at the Cirque Medrano.

It is a commonplace that clowning runs in families. Perhaps this is more the case with acrobats than with any other class of entertainers. However, our exhaustive and painstaking researches incidental to the compiling of this tremendous tome convince us that this family stuff is true, whoever says it. Pierre Mariel argues that to become a real clown one must have inhaled circus odors in one's youth. Practically every first-rate clown began training at an age when other youngsters were candidates for initiation into the Holy Order of Boy Scouts.

George Jean Nathan once remarked that "all children are natural actors—save nine-tenths of those on the stage". We are wholeheartedly agin clowning by children ; our protest is not actuated by sentimentality or respect for the Child Labor Laws, but by the stupidity of infantile comedy. By all means let the Fratellinis train their young hopefuls to carry on, but let the public appearances of the kids be put off till their elders are too feeble to roll about in the sawdust.

Up till lately all the circus infanterie received certain standardized training in the fundamentals of acrobatics, dancing, and the playing of different musical instru-

ments. Their apprenticeship was long, trying, and often dangerous. The purpose of all this was the inculcation of the grace and self-confidence that would insure an easy demeanor in the ring. In this day of specialization and novelty in the circus, there are too many mushroom entertainers whose very entrances and exits betray a lamentable lack of general training. But in the circus there has never been a special course of training for clowns, no correspondence school standardization. The clown should present a synthesis of all the elements of the circus. The good clown is an acrobat, a juggler, a prestidigitator, a musician, and above all a good comedian ; because of this true versatility he dares burlesque these various accomplishments.

A clown is either first-rate or a dead flop. There is no such thing as a mediocre clown. There is nothing more painful to watch than bum comedy. It is Monsieur Bergson's opinion that one might compare a good clown to those caricatures which are reduced to a few lines and a touch of color, but which despite their simplicity are truer than photographs.

Pierre Mariel has written: "A good clown caricatures his fellow men; a great one parodies himself. He juggles with ridicule the way St. Denis juggled his head. The clown moves about like a knight on a chessboard: his actions like his dialogue are a series of jumps : his spirit makes more *sautes périlleux* than his body." Theodore de Banville wrote: "Between the adjectives possible and impossible, the mime has made his choice. He chose impossible. It is in the impossible that he trains himself. That which is impossible is that which he performs."



Alberto Fratellini
Drawing by Heuzé

Perhaps one of the factors in clown success is the gratification of the childhood wish of the spectator. Many of the prize dreams of childhood are accomplished by the clown before one's very eyes: the breaking of vast quantities of crockery ; the wholesale swallowing of enormous pastries ; the discomfiting of policeman and other such pompous asses ; and the burlesqueing of parents, classic dancers and musicians, strong men, and other pretentious bores.

The tremendous stylization in costume and makeup serves to isolate the clown, making him sufficiently impersonal to indulge in great license. He becomes an abstract symbol. The whitening or blackening of the face serves as a protection somewhat in the manner of the domino of the Renaissance ; at that period the person so disguised could almost literally get away with murder. Unwritten law has accorded the masque many special privileges and exemptions. Abuse eventually called forth written laws strictly forbidding the use of the masque outside of the theatre. Almost without exception, clowns have appreciated their special position and have seldom overstepped.

The iconoclasm of the clown has often through ridicule brought about the downfall of the tin gods who thrive on dignity. The Charlie Chaplin Bullfighters in Spain are causing a severe slump in the stock of the local toreadors, matadors, picadors, stevedores, and other professional heroes. If they prove, as they are threatening to do, that bullfighting is less dangerous than lacrosse, basketball, and such like minor and major pastimes, the ancient Carthaginian sport will soon follow the path of the Bunny Hug and the high-wheel bycycle.

The woman clown is almost non-existent in the history of the profession. At the present day, Loulou the *parleur* who is teamed with the *august* Atoff, is about the

only one of importance. America is familiar with the woman low comedian of the type of Marie Dressler and Kate Elinor. But in general our musical comedy tradition allows the woman to appear ridiculous for no more than two acts, after which she emerges in a blaze of contrasting elegance, as for example Mizzi Hajos in *Sari* and Charlotte Greenwood in *Letty*.

Clowns are the greatest users of sure-fire stuff, comedy that has been tried and tested throughout the ages. The oldest hokum is employed to give the spectator a feeling of superiority, such as the exhibition of a clumsiness and stupidity far surpassing similar virtues in the worst dumbbell in the audience, and being the victims of practical jokes which every simpleton among the pewholders would like to perpetrate.

But if there are ambitious ones among the audience who think they would like to sport about in the arena we bid them pause and reflect that it really has a painful side. One of the most persistent myths attached to the clown business is that the blows delivered, while apparently lusty, are in some mysterious fashion rendered entirely harmless to the receiver. The left cheek of almost every veteran clown is as hard and dry as parchment from the constant reception of blows, and sometimes even one eye is a bit out of plumb. The retail clothing business shouldn't be safer, but it is.

The outstanding types among present-day clowns are the *speaker* (classic white-faced clown), the *grotesque*, the *august*, the *contra-august* and the *elegant*. The *august* and the *speaker* were accidental creations, the first resulting from the drunken actions of a circus stableman, and the second because of the illness of a regular clown

and the consequent substitution of an interlocutory personage. The *elegant* is a typical European circus character, generally presented as a ringmaster, immaculately and faultlessly attired, and unbelievably dignified until a sudden slapstick clout puts him on his back. Mr. Gilbert Seldes, writing in *Vanity Fair* for July 1923, erroneously refers to M. Lucien Godart, *elegant* at the Cirque Medrano as an *august*. Perhaps the finest example of an *august* that we ever had in America was the Charlie Chaplin of the music hall and early cinema days. Big feet and ill-fitting clothing are important characteristics in the getup of an *august*. It is interesting to speculate on what might have happened to Chaplin if he hadn't found a medium in the movies. Clowns in America, stemming from the achievements of that immortal boob-catcher P.T. Barnum, grew to such proportions that individual clowns were swamped. A great deal of slush was recently spilled over the death of the veteran American clown, Al Miaco ; it is a question as to whether the blurbers had ever been able to distinguish Miaco from his confreres in a three-ring circus which boasted a score of clowns.

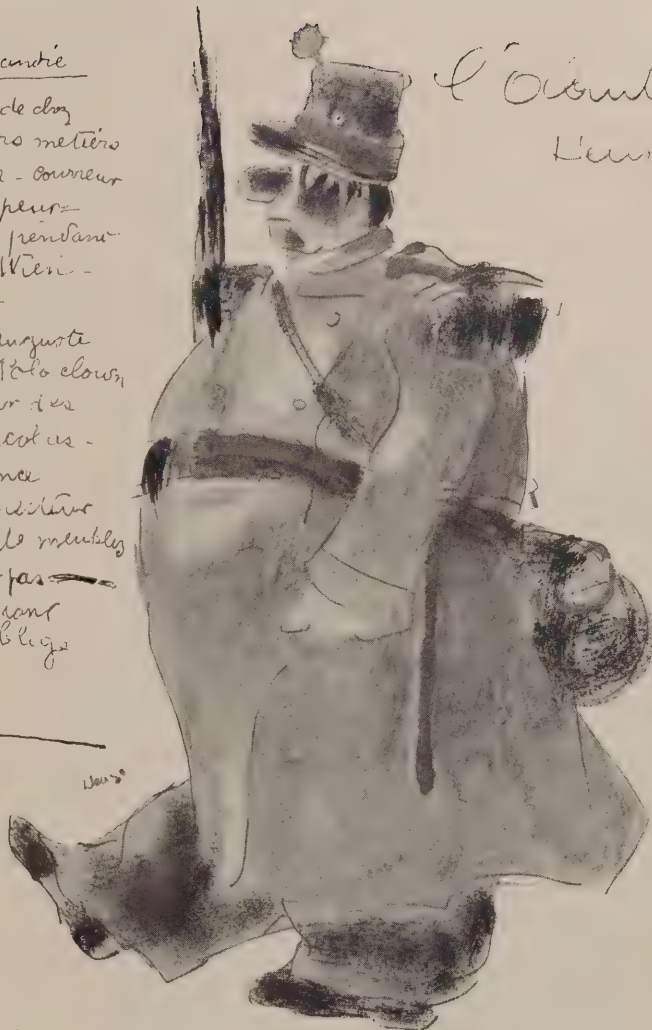
Few of the younger generation in America know the one-ring circus. True, there are still a few traveling the bush circuits. But even before the advent of the movie, the small circus was become as unprofitable venture, and there was a tendency toward combination in fruitless endeavor to compete with the half dozen "Greatest Shows on Earth". On the Continent, particularly in France, the *cirque intime* has never lost in popularity and is today more strongly entrenched than ever. Paris boasts four permanent small circuses, the *Cirque de Paris*, *Cirque d'Hiver*, *Nouveau Cirque*, and *Cirque Medrano*.

The *cirque intime* has many and obvious advantages. There is never more than one act in the ring at a time, though as the acts are changing half a dozen minor

Heuzé né en 1885 en Normandie

Parti à l'âge de 14 ans de chez
mes Parents, exerçant divers métiers
après avoir été en broderie fine - coudre
à pied - puis tailleur-coupeur
ensuite ~~conseiller~~ un excentric pendant
9 ans à Monte-Carlo - à Vienne -
à Petrograd et Odessa -
en 1912 retour à Petrograd au poste
de chargé d'affaires avec 1200 clous
français - puis conservateur des
Embras du grand Duc Nicolas -
~~à la~~ retour en France
employé puis reformé - directeur
de galerie - puis expert de meubles
antiques - ma vie n'étant pas
terminée j'ignore ce que vous
pensez je suis encore obligé
de faire

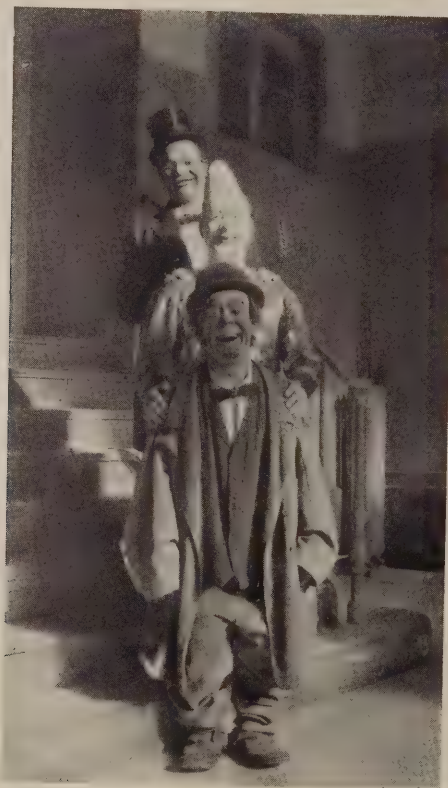
Heuzé



L'Œuvre
Heuzé

Heuzé's autobiography, presented above with his self-portrait, is warmly endorsed by the authors of this book as a masterpiece of brevity. Consider it in comparison with the long-winded self-histories of ex-ambassadors and politicians which constitute such a large proportion of America's recent literary output.

clowns rush noisily about and officiously help the canvasmen. As all the action is visible from every point in the house, it must of necessity be entertainment of a calibre that will bear such close scrutiny. This is particularly true of the clown acts. Instead of the confused antics and tumblings of bespangled figures lost in the kaleidoscope of three rings and five stages, the single small arena produces definite individualistic comiques of the class of Charlie Chaplin. In Paris, the Fratellinis, Charlie, Frank Pichel, Coco, Chocolat, Porto, are familiar names. In a three-ring show, swamped by numbers and visible only to small sections of the house, these excellent mimes would be at a tremendous disadvantage. The cirque intime permits them a



Coco, Cyerillo (recently deceased),
and Charley of the Cirque de Paris

wide range of buffoonery and indulgence in slapstick subtleties that would be lost in a larger arena.

A good concrete example of the stifling of an excellent clown in a mammoth show was the submerging of Marceline in the early days of the New York Hippodrome. Fine mime though he was, the sheer magnitude of the structure as well as the great number of people employed on the stage at the same time, reduced him to the position of just one of many entertainers. Where one person went to laugh at Marceline, nine went because the Hippodrome was the largest showhouse in New York. Grock is another case in point. His quick and subtle changes of expression are lost in a very big playhouse. Or to prove it the other way, imagine Balieff, who is an excellent *clown parleur*, trying to establish contact with a mammoth audience and in such a large auditorium as say, the Metropolitan Opera House. On a big stage the clown ceases to be a *clown parleur* and must of necessity depend on fundamental slapstickery, or specialities as the Arnaut Brothers depended on their whistling, or on spectacular entrance such as Al Miaco achieved through the use of stilts.



Drawing by Heuzé

Several of the Paris clowns have attained such popularity that they are forced to alternate music-hall work with their regular nightly circus performances.

We assure all our readers, if any, who have resolutely ploughed through these pages, that we have not had the slightest intention of compiling a Wellsian outline of clowns. The only purposes of this extended essay have been the presentation of a very sketchy picture of clowning at various periods, the upsetting of a few myths, and the airing of the prejudices and opinions of two ardent believers in slapstickery. The slight attention we have given anecdotes about clowns argues a fine restraint on our part. Clowns, more than any other class of entertainers, are heavily afflicted with anecdote. For your further satisfaction we herewith append an admirable bibliography.



Drawing by Heuzé

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Porto



H. Long

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